

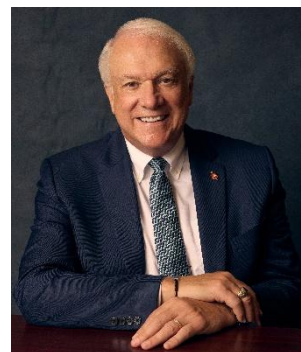
Sunday Announcements for April 27, 2025



April 21, 2025

Revisiting Religion: The Search for Something More

In Sunday's *New York Times* there appeared an article by Lauren Jackson with the headline, "Religion's Role, Revisited." This piece explores how some people have struggled to find a way to fill the spiritual void in their lives — especially in the days in which we are living.



Jackson shares that because people are "unhappier than they've ever been, and the country is in an epidemic of loneliness," there seems to be a revisiting of the role religion plays in our lives. In the article, Jackson writes:

"In a country where most people are pessimistic about the future and don't trust the government, where hope is hard to come by, people are longing to believe in something. Religion can offer beliefs, belonging and behaviors all in one place; it can enchant life; most important, it tells people that their lives have a purpose."

People are longing to believe in something, and they continually search for it — even when it alludes them. There have been moves away from religion and moves toward secularization. But something to believe in?

This is what the church consistently offers:

- It's more than Advent expectancy — it's the belief in a virgin birth.
- It's more than just a baptism — it's God claim on Jesus' life and ministry — "this is my beloved son in whom I well pleased."
- It's more than a life well lived that came to a dark conclusion — it's a resurrection to new life.
- It's more than a big crowd on a Pentecost Sunday — it's the gift of one voice through the unifying power of the Holy Spirit.

People want to believe. They need a place to belong. And they long for a series of consistent behaviors that will demonstrate that this belief can really make a life-changing difference in their own lives.

What this means, is that the Sunday after Easter is just as important as Easter Sunday itself. It's not just about a day or a service or a gathering. It's all about a lifestyle that demonstrates that this belief makes a noticeable difference.

People are longing for something. Jackson says that this search for something more is leading people to look to "heady concepts — confession, atonement, forgiveness, grace, and redemption for answers."

No one comes to church to hear endless debates or to witness people who cannot find a way to get along. No one comes to church for another problem or a shallow, perfunctory worship service. People come to church longing for an answer.

Jackson says that religion “can” offer beliefs, belonging, and behaviors. She does not say that religion “does.” For years now I have been perplexed by the inward turned nature of a church that seems to be more centered on survival than it is on intentionally spreading hope. I don’t understand the endless debates on subjects that have little meaning at the expense of those who long for the church to welcome and embrace them. I cannot figure out how professing Christians are not able to move from hurt to forgiveness and reconciliation. And I scratch my head when I experience more Good Fridays in church than I do Easter Sundays.

There is a tremendous amount of darkness and death in the world today. Every day we find ourselves saying, “what’s next” when another policy unfolds that dehumanizes and devalues people, another random shooting takes place that robs a life full of potential, or another war unfolds that demonstrates how little human life is valued.

The last place Good Friday needs to dwell is in the church. Good Friday is everywhere. We only have a Good Friday because it is the event that sets the stage for the real reason of our being – a new life, a renewed hope, and a vision that with the power of God at work in our lives there actually is something more.

It seems today that whether it’s inside the church or outside in the world everything is an “issue,” a “problem.” But if all we do is focus on the issue and do not find a way to inject hope and purpose into our “issues,” then we will never truly be the Easter people we are called to be.

Today I’m thinking of two people who I describe as some of the most determined social activists I know. Their lives center on justice ministries and radical acts of hospitality that do everything possible to make everyone feel welcome. They march in protests, they lobby their legislators, and they organize their congregation for meaningful outreach. These two people are not known for their glum and downtrodden demeanors. You do not see them carrying a placard with an angry face. They admit that their ministry tires them, but they do not complain about the need to engage in it. In fact, they are both known for their robust smiles, their wry sense of humor, and the joy they radiate to others.

Nelson Mandela suffered greatly at the hands of an unjust world around him. Yet Mandela said, *“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is the difference we have made to the lives of others.”*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came up against formidable and life-threatening obstacles of violence, opposition, and hatred in his work for civil rights. Yet King said, *“I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”*

What makes people capable of such selflessness? It’s tied up in beliefs, belonging, and behaviors. It’s what we offer to a broken and misguided world. It’s the source of our hope. Those reminders, those demonstrations of belief are the very things that has given the church such a powerful witness over the years.

During these days following Easter, I’m looking for the witness of resurrection people! I’m looking for a demonstration of Christ alive in and through the people of the church. I’m not looking for us to be like a world that retaliates and seeks retribution when someone says something we don’t like. I’m looking for

someone to rise above the fray and remind the world that there IS something to hope for, something to believe in, and something to hold onto as we walk into the future.

I'm not looking for a Good Friday group hiding in the bushes. I'm looking for an Easter people, a group of believers ready offer something more with joy, and promise, and possibility.

Today in Easter worship, we read this prayer of confession. While I apologize for not knowing the author, I do not apologize for what it says:

*God of mercy, we no longer look for Jesus among the dead,
but we confess before you that we gravitate still
toward the things of death.*

Hatred too often hardens our hearts.

Resentment too frequently occupies our spirits.

Indifference too regularly stifles a spirit of compassion and servanthood.

Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ.

Make us to die every day to sin, that we might know the joy of resurrection through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

This is what we CAN do because we ARE an Easter people of hope and joy.

May it be so.

The Journey Continues, . . .



Thomas J. Bickerton
Resident Bishop



Special Prayers for these Wesley Family, Friends, and Others...

Danny & Veronica Winder, Stephen Boyns, Janet DeNapoli, Robert Craft (friend of Michael Terzian), Shea Pugh, Troy (David Potts brother, wife of Cathy), David Patrick (Evette Walters husband), Kathleen Herbert (Evette Walters mom), Carolyn Bellil, Debbie Plant, Sandra O'Driscoll, Melissa Houlihan (friend of Bill Robbins), Alice Douglas, Cathy (sister-in-law of David Potts), Rich Reynolds, Grace Woode, Beverly Grimshaw, Rosamond Hammond, Linda Keister, Pinamang Boateng, Joseph Boateng, Anne Burrows, Dot Ellis, Barbara Fletcher, Don Johnson, Charles Kiefer, Dorothy Norcross, David Samanen, Janet Terzian, Donald Tremblay, Barbara and the Vietze Family; Peter Woodcock, Laura Zoldak, Susan (friend of David Potts), Page (Allison Hansen's sister), Libby T. (friend of Phyllis Yngve), Paula and Calvin Kelly (sister and brother-in-law of Linda Dylewicz), Those who struggle with depression, anxiety, and alcoholism.

Announcements

UPCOMING EVENTS

TODAY! All Church Meeting following worship
May 18 – All Church Meeting following worship

It's that Time of Year again! Graduates...

Do you have a child(ren) graduating from high school or college? If so, please email your child's name(s), school he/she is graduating from, and where he/she plans on attending next. We will be lifting up their names in June. Please email or leave a note in the office by Sunday, May 11th at (office@wesleyworc.org). Please print clearly so I can read it. *Debi Reynolds*

From Carty Cupboard Food Pantry... For the month of April, we are in need of meals in a can, like Chef Boyardee, and baked beans. Also, cold cereal, and oatmeal in variety packages please. The request for hot cereal continues through all seasons. Thank You to everyone who continues to help to feed those in need. *Nancy*

May 2025 Herald: There are extra copies of the Herald in the Narthex by the Welcome Office.

The May Herald will be part of the May 4th bulletin. Please have all articles to me by Monday, April 28th the latest. Thank you for your cooperation. *Debi*

Help Keep Families in Their Homes

Looking for a way to help Worcester families face homelessness? Buy groceries or a cup of coffee! This is an easy way to help address our city's growing numbers of unhoused individuals and families.

- 1) Buy a gift card for Shaw's, Stop & Shop, Big Y, CVS, Panera, Dunkin, Starbucks, Amazon, Target, or TJ Maxx/Marshalls. Larger orders, please email Allison Hansen at AChis4788@aol.com.
- 2) Do your regular shopping.
- 3) Rejoice that close to 10 percent of your purchase goes to grants for back rent, utilities, car repair or other expenses that make the difference for families remaining home or on the street.
- 4) Repeat!

Allison will be in Brewer Hall after church on:

May 4 – Don't forget Mother's Day! ● June 1

Thank you! Allison Hansen

GOD MOMENT

If you could share a story of seeing God's work in your life, please tell me or email it to me. The story can be anonymous or signed, and all are invited to participate. Betsy (betspenn35@hotmail.com)

God Moments from Betsy Pennino--

The Friday morning Lenten class is reading a book which holds our attention with stories while offering fresh insights to discuss-- The Grace of Les Miserables. The way that the book, and the group leader, were found seemed to be blessed. Veronica Winder had volunteered to lead a book group and Chris Flagg asked her about the Les Miserables book. Veronica had been wanting to read that book ever since she'd bought it several years ago, before she moved here.

The author, Methodist Pastor Matt Rawle, writes what could be the basis of God Moments: "God is always calling our name. God is always reminding us of God's presence." There are also many God Moments in the book, such as Valjean's chance finding of Cosette on Christmas Eve. Her mother had asked Valjean to find Cosette, and it was a life-saving Christmas gift for both of them.

All of the God Moments and Valjean's choices led to his transformation from a thief who distrusted most people to a generous helper of strangers and loved ones. Much of this change was caused by acts of kindness toward him by chance acquaintances.